

Role of the School Psychologist in the Inclusion Education from the Teachers' Point of View: A Case Study

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of the school psychologist in the inclusion education from the teachers' point of view. We use a qualitative methodology by the analysis of 50 questionnaires addressed to the teachers of different elementary and secondary schools in the region of Elbasan (Albania). The school psychological services in Albania have become an essential need of the society supported by a legal framework, which supports the entire restructuring process. Despite this, problems of education in schools have faced difficulties because social phenomena such as: inclusion, bullying and drugs that today are diverse. Even the students with special needs are facing a lot of problems related mainly to their acceptance by the other students in the mainstream classes. In Albania the inclusion in education is still in its first steps although we have a good legal framework. Actually there is not an appropriate infrastructure for the special need students and even the reconstructions or the constructions of the new schools are bypassing this special infrastructure.

Keywords: psychology, inclusion, education, special needs, students

1. Introduction

Inclusive education means that all the students are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in appropriate age, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. The inclusion process increases the participation of students in the school, and lowers the exclusion from cultures, curricula and communities of local schools. It enables the restructuring of the cultures, policies and practices in the school so that they respond to diversity of the students in the area where they live.

The inclusion process reduces the barriers to learning and the participation for all students, not just those students with handicaps or called with special needs persons. Learning through efforts to overcome the obstacles allows the participation of special students to make changes for the benefit of other students in a larger scale.

The inclusion in education is the process of including special need students in common schools. This can be done adapting the environment with all its components in accordance with the needs of each child with SN¹, but also adapting social components enabling to have the spirit of a community acceptance. The recent European studies have also enabling and setting a parallel between social relationships and experiences waging a principled connection between the concept of inclusion and that of normalization.

The concept of inclusion today is driven by the social model which means that the SN phenomenon is not a factor that hinders the progress of this model in socio-economic, cultural and educational.

Inclusive education is a process that enables all children, including marginalized groups, learn and participate effectively in the process of learning in public schools. For this reason all schools and the Albanian education system must change to adapt to the diversity of student needs.

Implementation of inclusive education is the right of every person to education, so it aims to provide optimal conditions for learning and developing all students, regardless of individual differences they have. This is a big enough challenge for all teachers and administrators of education and further. Also, inclusion is to increase participation in the learning process and involvement in the game of all children and young people, is the support of various structures to make them better respond to general training, interests, experience, knowledge and skills of students.

As stated above, inclusive education is achieved only when the learning environment is the same and does not

¹ Special Needs

create differences between ordinary students and those with SN.

In the inclusion process the school psychologists play a very important role. The school psychologists are often involved in the evaluation of students and therefore are involved in discussions and decisions on the type of school that should follow these children. School psychologists are also involved with research, development and evaluation of inclusion initiatives working with students, families, community and support staff to improve the educational experience. To prove the efficiency of research results on the process of inclusion school psychologists work in individual or group level.

2. The Albanian Experience from Segregation, Integration and Later to the Inclusion

About the 1960s in Albania we see early efforts to have an institutionalized treatment of children with SN. First it became possible to open some special classes for deaf and blind children.

Their expansion in Tirana led to the creation of a National Institute which after many years managed to split into two separate institutions, one for blind children and one for deaf children.

For children with significant development problems, mental retardation, etc., the Ministry of Health created several residential centers. In the recent years these institutions have passed under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

To cope with the multiple outs from school, under an 8-year compulsory education system, after the 1970s, was felt necessary to establish in the country's main cities some special schools for children with mild mental disabilities and for those schools were drafted by special curricula.

In Albania, for the children with SN, actually are in function 6 special schools (Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlorë and Korça), three residential centers in Shkodër, Tirana and Sauk (Tirana) and two national institutions (Tirana).

Despite the work and achievements of these institutions in time, we cannot say that in Albania there was a genuine special education system in terms of organization and functioning. Less severe cases, which comprise the largest number and for those with learning difficulties, parents try to put them in public education schools closer to their peers.

The current law neither prohibits nor guarantees such action. Practice has shown that there is a wrong perception on the part of teachers regarding inclusive classes, because of the special needs of the students with SN. The opening of special schools affected negatively to the teachers by legitimating somehow the removing of these children towards the special schools.

The parents were faced with dilemmas and problematic situations, going from their rejection to the secret abandonment of this category of children in the class, "legalizing" segregation and exclusion in children's education.

Even the part that finally reaches to be registered by the pressure of parents in ordinary classrooms, after one or two years of lessons abandons the school because of the bitter experiences that they pass in them. The reasons that go in favor of this cause – effect relationship of this situation is that teachers feel unprepared for this process, are untrained, lack adequate infrastructure and teaching materials basis.

The medical model for persons with disabilities seems still to dominate the social model.

In 1998-1999 comes to a messy situation in this area, given that even the Albanian state had failed to fully stabilize because of the situation created a year ago², but despite this situation, it seems clear awareness of all opinion for a new change in the relationship with these children by further democratize the Albanian society by holding a new attitude to socialize as much as these children.

The reality in the Albanian schools shows that despite the lack of the conditions and with a large number of students in classrooms, there are many instances where ordinary school teachers hold in their classes and treat with inclusion methods children who represent various disabilities.

Despite efforts to achieve the maximum, we should emphasize, that their actions have failed to bring about changes in working practices and methods used in the classroom.

In Albania there is not an appropriate infrastructure for the SN students and even the reconstructions or the construction of the new school are bypassing this special infrastructure.

In the 1990' is talked for the first time in Albania about integrating practices in both form and content. After the 2000, under vigorous democratic transformations in our country are changing even the attitudes of parents, teachers and the community in order to educate these children.

For social reasons, parents increasingly are addressed to common schools making children an equal part of these

² In 1997 Albania experienced a civil turmoil

school communities, also the methodologies that place in the center the child facilitate more classroom work, deploying these children in that they are able to realize better.

They are aware of their children's opportunities and have increased the demands and claims for a better treatment and education of their children within the mainstream schools considering this not as a privilege, but as a human right that should enjoy everyone.

In this situation, as submitted above, one of the most significant aspects that occasionally rise from educators and experts in the field is the lack of preparation of teachers for special education problems and lack of specialist support services.

In the preparation of new teachers are totally neglected these aspects. The year 1998 marks the initiative of training of teachers and school leaders for this problem, but it certainly was not enough to say quite symbolic. Many school failure, school dropouts etc., are explained by the failure of teachers and the school in general.

So to find the best solutions is the most convenient moment to fight for a new vision. Since our requirements in this area are large enough the need arise to be contemporary and should be thought and worked hard on how to create more of a good school for all where every individual, with or without SN, to feel like a valuable and welcome members.

Based on global experiences is becoming a lot of work to be applied in our schools. Considering the experience and the specific conditions of our country, of course it is difficult to restructure schools and to make it available to everyone. The school system and teachers find it difficult to give up easily from their routine.

In parallel with suitable reorganization that facilitate their conditions in classrooms must also change the attitudes of teachers and all public opinion and to train teachers to better cope with the problems.

Little by little, this process quite naturally shifted from segregation to integration to date for inclusion speaking.

This process has started gradually, introducing different practices. Another very important direction is the training of teachers and school psychologists currently served through RED³ and various NGOs.

Mainstream schools have reserves and numerous opportunities that can be put into motion. Special schools should be turned them on resource centers to support common education to meet the many needs of our society today.

3. The Situation of the Psychology Service in Albania

Besides the school reform in both form and content, the school psychological services couldn't stay out of attention as an innovation of the last decade in the country. This service became an essential need of society supported by a legal framework, which supports the entire restructuring process. Problems of education in schools have faced difficulties because social phenomena such as: inclusion, bullying and drugs, today are diverse.

Therefore, in these conditions, the school needs for technical assistance in the field of psychological service, which evaluates the entire school community. The school psychologist is the center of gravity in this service offering solution alternatives and keeping direct relationships with students, teachers and community. The school psychologist also practices in school environment psychological, social and emotional approximations to the children.

3.1 What is the role of the school psychologist?

Instruction no. 16 dated 24/07/2012 for the 2012-2013 school year in Secondary Education dedicates a special place on school psychological services, and among others emphasizes the participation of all stakeholders by coordinating the work in such a way that the relationship teacher-psychologist achieve proper results in working with students with SN as follows:

1. Responsible institutions should take measures to consolidate school psychological services and implement all the tasks of the psychologist pursuant to instruction number. 18 dated 21.04.2008 "On the functioning of school psychological services in Secondary Education".
2. The school psychologist should be engaged in addressing the problems related to ensuring the right to education with focus children with SN.
3. All schools that receive this service should raise support group of the psychologist for solving problems that arise.
4. According to the legal framework and School Psychologist Manual (Tirana 2006), school psychologist performs a range of services for which it designs and implements individual programs preventing risks and

³ Regional Education Departments

problems that threaten the difficult students or those failing in school.

Also seeing that such students' tolerance and understanding is in very low grades, he tries to promote these qualities to them, trying to emphasize the appreciation of diversity within the school community. Also according to the manual, one of the key points of the psychologist's role is to cooperate with the teaching staff and parents of students in order to create a friendly spirit and a healthy environment in school. Here we will include even the consultations which have a very important role. School psychologist collaborates with teachers and parents to find more successful and effective solutions for students' behavioral problems.

He helps others understand, for example the adolescent development and how this affects the learning stage and behavior. According to the aforementioned legal framework as well as the manual in question, the psychologist organizes consultations by preventing these problems and in the end of his work makes assessments where determines whether the service practices and learning in school are appropriate or not. The school psychologist attends to student academic skills and capacity to learn and also it determines the level of socio-emotional and mental health status of students and learning conditions in schools.

4. Methodology and the Results of the Research

This study is a qualitative research made by the interpretation of the questionnaires by the excel computer program. This study was conducted with the participation of 50 teachers of different elementary and secondary schools in the region of Elbasan (Albania).

The aim of this study was to assess the role of the school psychologist in the process of inclusion from the teachers' point of view. This process is directly related to what our school offers today to enhance the quality of psychology service and also takes place in the range of techniques and strategies for the successful realization of the educational process in inclusive schools.

The analysis of questionnaires of the teachers, *where the first question was regarding the recognition of psychological services*, indicated that 94% of them claimed that this service exists and in 6% of cases they emphasize that this service is not recognized by them because not all rural areas have this service or the quality of the service is poor.

The second question, *if you ever had a conflict with students in the classroom have you ever seek the help of a psychologists*, only 6% of teachers say they have sought the help of a psychologist while 94% of them deny to contact a psychologist. From here we can emphasize that teachers still do not have a clear idea of the duties and functions of the psychologist and this is due to a relatively poor job of psychologists who in many cases are almost fictitious.

Third question, *about teachers' collaboration with psychologist on issues like: the recognition of the needs of students, identifying conflict or design programs that encourage motivation*, teachers in 56% of cases say that they have difficulties in recognizing the needs of students, in 22% of cases have problems in identifying conflicts and in 22% of cases in designing programs that encourage motivation.

Fourth question, *if you felt the need of a psychologist for the education of students with SN, and if so, where it consisted*, teachers answered that in 34% of cases they have felt the need of a psychologist while in 66% of cases they do not have felt the need of the presence of a psychologist.

Fifth question, *whether school psychologist pursues under a joint plan the progress of these students with SN*, according to the analysis of the results we have in 61% of cases that the school psychologists follow a plan with students, in 31% of cases say that psychologists do not follow a plan and in 8% of cases they do not know if they follow or not a joint plan with them.

Sixth question, *on the suspicion that in any case you have been de-conspired by a school psychologist*, all teachers respond negatively in all cases. This shows that teachers have almost a blind faith regarding school psychologists. In fact it would be premature to draw any conclusions or recommendations at this point because the number of cases that teachers report to school psychologists is relatively low.

Seventh question, *whether your school psychologist has treated various training topics*, teachers respond on 44% of cases that the psychologists have treated different training topics while 56% of them deny having received different training.

Eighth question, *what is the average number of students with SN in classrooms where teachers teach classes*, they respond that the average number of students with SN is 1-2. Is understood that this number is set by law and the number of students with NS in a common class should not be higher than 2.

Ninth question, *if the classroom environment is not suitable to work with students with SN and how will you react in*

this case, 50% of teachers responded that they would accept it, 36% responded that they would try to regulate it and only 14% say they would find another solution. From the answers we notice that most teachers would accept it even though the environment is not suitable, and in fact it shows a deficit by them who really in this case should seek to remedy it.

Tenth question, *when some of the students with SN do not go well with others how would you react*, teachers in 70% of cases responded they will be mediators, in 30% of cases will find another solution.

Eleventh question, *if you try to include students with NS in the conversation, but some of them remain silent, what would you do in such a case*, the 34% of teachers responded that they would leave them alone while, the rest of 66% said they would include them in the conversation. In fact we should note here that depending on the type of the disability there will be taken the decisions to include or not the student in conversation when he remains silent.

Twelfth question, *how do you behave when students with SN make mistakes*, in 70% of cases the teachers respond that will point out only the typical mistakes and then discuss them together, while the responses of: immediate correction, taking notes and discuss with each student, finding another solution have equal respective weights by 10%.

Thirteenth question, *of how will you react when students with SN are not fluent*, in 50% of cases teachers responded that will try to work at their own pace, in 30% of cases will strive to promote less, in 14% of cases find another solution and only in 6% of cases stated that will interrupt them with courtesy or would give the word to more fluent students.

Fourteenth question, *of how will you react when students with SN are not effective*, 44% of teachers say they will try to prove this through conversation, 42% say that they would later explain the problem they have and only 7% will try to find another solution.

Fifteenth question, *if you have attended training or workshops related to the SN issues*, only 18% say yes, while the remaining 82% deny to be trained or take seminars on SN issues. In fact, according to our study we recommend that training and workshops for teachers should be more frequent especially in the treatment of students with NS.

Sixteenth question, *which institution has offered these training*, teachers in 68% of cases responded that these trainings are offered by NGO and only 32% from the Regional Education Departments. It is to be noted that the University "A. Xhuvani"⁴ does not offer training on this issue.

Seventeenth question, *if there is any resource information center in your school*, all teachers responded that these centers are lacking in their schools.

Eighteenth question, *how satisfied are you with the conditions with which you work with students with SN*, most teachers (41%) said they were somewhat satisfied, 34% said they were satisfied, 7% not at all satisfied while 5% are very satisfied.

5. Conclusions

- ✓ In Albania, for the children with SN, actually are in function 6 special schools (Tirana, Durres, Elbasan, Vlora and Korca), three residential centers in Shkodra, Tirana and Sauk (Tirana) and two national institutions (Tirana).
- ✓ Instruction no. 16 dated 24/07/2012 for the 2012-2013 school year in Secondary Education dedicates a special place on school psychological services, and among others emphasizes the participation of all stakeholders by coordinating the work in such a way that the relationship teacher-psychologist achieve proper results in working with students with SN.
- ✓ According to the legal framework and School Psychologist Manual (Tirana 2006), school psychologist performs a range of services for which it designs and implements individual programs preventing risks and problems that threaten the difficult students or those failing in school.
- ✓ From the analyze we can emphasize that teachers still do not have a clear idea of the duties and functions of the school psychologist and this is due to a relatively poor job of the school psychologists who in many cases are almost fictitious.
- ✓ From the analyze the teachers need to collaborate with education psychologists about: in 56% of cases when they have difficulties in recognizing the needs of students, in 22% of cases when they have problems in identifying conflicts and in 22% of cases in designing programs that encourage motivation.
- ✓ According to our study we recommend that training and workshops for teachers should be more frequent especially in the treatment of students with NS.

⁴ The only Public University in Elbasan city

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